

# ARTICULATING SHOPPING MALL LOYALTY IN THE POST PANDEMIC SCENARIO

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## ABSTRACT

*The pandemic COVID-19 has negatively impacted the retail industry. The shopping malls that were once the popular meeting hubs have now witnessed a steep fall in the foot traffic. The pandemic restrictions were lifted in India after several months of lockdown. The shopping malls were reopened in the state of Maharashtra in the month of September 2020. In this competitive consumer landscape, it becomes imperative for shopping malls to offer safe, hygienic and high-quality services to attract the customers back to their favourite mall. With this background the present study investigates the measures followed by the shopping malls in the Navi Mumbai region. 148 customers were included in the study. All of them voluntarily participated in the study and the data was collected in the digital mode. Exploratory and descriptive research designs have been utilized for in-depth identification and analysis of the responses collected from the customers. Inferential statistical tools like Chi-square, correlation and factor analysis were utilized for empirically examining the data. Findings highlighted that the safety and security measures, convenience and social distancing facilities and shopping offers were the three important dimensions that were important to the customers. Nearby locality, sitting options with social distancing, huge Atrium/ open space in the mall, sanitation and hygienic measures, well distanced parking options, freshly cooked hot food and 50% or more discount offers were the most preferred attributes to the customers. The results of the study indicated that COVID-19 has greatly impacted the choice of the customers while visiting their favourite shopping mall.*

**Keywords:** Shopping Mall, Customers, COVID-19, Mall Loyalty, Pandemic.

## INTRODUCTION

Shopping in a mall is no longer restricted to the chore of shopping. It involves an overall shopping experience depending upon various factors. The shopping mall euphoria has gone down with time. In today's world the mall management need to identify the factors that attracts the shoppers to visit their mall as a "*Mall loyal customer*". The static infrastructure of the shopping malls is the major constraint in the shopping experience of the customers. It is imperative for the mall managers to innovate and design the existing facilities to manage change and attract customers. Failure in doing it has led to the closure of various shopping malls (Prashar et. al., 2017). Research suggested that a comfortable and convenient experience in the mall was found to have a positive impact on the mall loyalty of the customers (Srivastava & Kaul, 2014).

The shopping mall environment has been referred as a service ecosystem. The governance of shopping malls has been based on the logic of "*service-dominance*". It has been defined as a "*relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange*" (Vargo & Lusch 2017).

Mall service quality and specific dimensions like the physical aspects, reliable atmosphere and personal attention to the customers were found to be effective towards customers loyalty (Diallo et. al. 2018). Increased customer involvement, developing positive perception towards brands in the mall indicated greater emotional attachment towards the mall (Shafiee & Es-haghi, 2017). The unique set of experiences that the shopping malls offer to the customers were the most effective dimensions for mall loyalty. These dimensions had different impact on different cultures and nationalities (Gilboa et.al. 2020).

As the pandemic hit India, the consumers shifted their spending's from fashion and luxuries to basic necessities. Shopping mall owners had to face various challenges. Post lockdown, the shopping mall owners were developing their capabilities through rapid experimenting. COVID-19 also changed the expectations of the customers. Online shopping was given a boost by this situation. Health and safety concerns made the customers less confident to visit the physical stores in their favourite mall. The Pandemic greatly affected the shopping pattern too. The shopping malls have reopened in the month of September 2020 in Mumbai, Maharashtra. Shoppers have been visiting their favourite mall after approximately six months. The present study attempts to understand the attributes that attracted the shoppers to visit the mall despite the risk associated with it.

## Review of Literature

The concept of shopping malls emerged from the western economies. Their social and economic contexts are different from that of Asian markets. In India, the retail markets emerged in the integrated format in the early 2000s (Singh & Prashar, 2014). Many malls were opened in the metropolitan cities of India, leading to clustering of malls in one locality. These were mostly replica of the format followed by the western countries. However, the Indian malls had marvellous exteriors to attract the shoppers to their mall (Prashar et al. 2015). In the initial phases the mall managers did not have the clarity of the preferences of the shoppers. The blend of the global and Indian standards led to a lot of experimenting (Singh & Sahay, 2012). Customer satisfaction in a shopping mall depends on various factors. Customers were more loyal to such malls that had proper lights, pleasing music and large atrium spaces. These factors were found to be positive towards customers emotional and behavioural intentions. (Yi & Kang, 2019). Green areas and touch of nature affected the mental health of the customer positively. Shopping malls with greenery merged with their infrastructure had more satisfied and loyal customers. Those customers exhibited positive behaviour towards the mall (Rosenbaum, et al. 2016). Despite of the availability of numerous techniques, understanding the attributes that lead to mall loyalty in the customers has remained subjective to culture, nationality and various other factors. Table 1 represents the attributes identified by various researchers prior to the pandemic COVID-19.

S.N	Key Attributes of Shopping mall loyalty	Authors
1	Range of products and services offered	Keller (2003)
2	Customers importance to retail tenant mix and atmosphere	Teller (2008)
3	Retail stores, entertainment options, dining place, play zones and cinemas	Chebat, Sirgy & Grzeskowiak, (2010)
4	Variety in the menu and dining experience in the mall	Kwun (2011)
5	Customers importance to tenant mix scheme	Yiu and Xu (2012)

6	Aesthetics of shopping malls	Ahmad (2012)
7	Mall design, entertainment and variety of services	Ali (2013)
8	Various styles, variety, quality products and services	Khong and Ong (2014)
9	Food quality, dining space and variety of food	Josiam et al. (2017)
10	Layout of the mall, colour, lighting, temperature and design	Das & Varshneya (2017)
11	Convenience and value for money	Prashar et al. (2017)
12	Product quality, range, quality and employees	Joudeh (2017)
13	Tangible and intangible factors of service quality	Diallo et al. (2018)
14	Proper pricing of products and value for money	Tsai (2018)
15	Promotional activities, fashion trends and technological innovations	Makgopa (2018)
16	Huge space and convenience	Idoko et al. (2019)
17	Mall atmosphere, location and entertainment	Thanasi-Boce et al. (2020)
18	Convenience, discounts and corporate culture	Zhang & Wei (2020)
19	Shopping mall environment and economic benefit	Showray et al. (2020)
20	Concerts, assisted shopping and virtual reality	Lucia-Palacios et al. (2020)

Due to the pandemic act, various measures were taken in the interest of public health and security. It also included the closure of shopping malls in spite of the various economic and political challenges (Yezli & Khan, 2020). Post lockdown measures have created various new research dimensions to understand the customers and the markets (Celik & Dane 2020) studied the effect of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the food preferences of the customers. Their study included four hundred and eleven participants from different nationalities. The results highlighted that the pandemic had a powerful impact on the consumption patterns of the customers. There was also a significant impact on the buying behaviour of the customers due to the pandemic. Rakhmanov, et al. (2020) identified through their work that there was greater anxiety and depression among the customers due to the pandemic Saprikis, et al. (2021) studied the mobile augmented reality apps in the shopping malls. Their work was an extension of the “*Unified theory on acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT)*”. Their work identified a new emerging trend amongst the buyer’s behaviour and intent to use technology in this post pandemic situation. There is limited literature available on the attributes of shopping mall loyalty during pandemic scenario. Present research attempts to identify such attributes that attract the shoppers during difficult pandemic situations. The study identified the attributes that strengthen the mall attributes that are liked by the customers. It provides better understanding of practices adopted by mall management. It empirically examines the factors that lead to visiting of the customers post the lockdown in Maharashtra. It contributes to the academic content about factors that develop mall loyalty.

### Purpose of the Research

This study was carried out for the understanding of the parameters that influence the mall loyalty of the customers during the COVID-19 spread in Mumbai. It tries to understand the three dimensions i.e., Safety and Security measures, Convenience and Social distancing facilities and Shopping offers. Data analysis represents the influence of each factor under these dimensions on influencing the mall loyalty of the customers. The paper aims to discuss these parameters that will be beneficial for mall managers as well as the customers during and after the deadly COVID-19 outbreak.

## Research Methods

Present research has exploratory and descriptive research design. Data has been collected from 148 customers from the Navi Mumbai region. Two malls were identified (most visited mall) by the customers. These malls were “Grand Central” mall in “Seawoods” and “Inorbit” Mall in “Vashi”. The study area is Navi Mumbai region in Maharashtra. Data has been collected in the months of October, November and December 2020, by random sampling technique. In the stage one of this study, qualitative methods were used to identify the three dimensions. Telephonic interviews were conducted to understand the attributes from the customers who visited the malls. This enabled in drafting the questionnaire. In the second stage the data collection was done. The responses were collected digitally in a tablet device in the food court area of the mall. Respondents were ensured of the social distancing norms and all the respondents were wearing masks to avoid any contact as per the directives of the Maharashtra state government. Inferential statistics, Pearson Correlation and Factor Analysis were the key statistical tools used for the analysis of the data.

### Present Research had the following Objectives

1. To understand the parameters that influence the mall loyalty of the customers in the post lockdown period due to pandemic.
2. It aims to explore the three dimensions i.e., Safety and Security measures, Convenience and Social distancing facilities and Shopping offers available to the customers post lock down in India

### Following Hypotheses were Framed for the Study

*H<sub>0</sub>A: There is no significant relationship between the factors of Safety and Security measures and mall loyalty of customers.*

*H<sub>0</sub>B: There is no significant difference between the factors of Convenience and Social distancing facilities and mall loyalty of customers.*

*H<sub>0</sub>C: There is no significant difference between the factors of Shopping offers available and mall loyalty of customers.*

The research methods followed in the study are represented in Table 2.

Title	Particulars
Research Design	Exploratory and Descriptive Research Design
Sample size	148
Study Area	Navi Mumbai- “Grand Central” mall in “Seawoods” and “Inorbit” Mall in “Vashi”
Sampling Technique	Random Sampling
Research Instrument	Structured Questionnaire 5-Point Likert Scale
Statistical methods	Cronbach’s Alpha, Chi Square, Correlation, Factor Analysis

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis of the responses collected from 148 customers identified three major dimensions of mall loyalty in the Covid 19 outbreak. These three dimensions are: Safety and Security measures, Convenience and Social distancing facilities and Shopping offers. Table 3 represents the variables included in the study.

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>
Safety and Security measures	Nearby locality, safe parking options, freshly cooked hot food, frequent sanitation in the mall	Mall Loyalty
Convenience and Social distancing facilities	Sitting options with social distancing, Huge Atrium/ open space in the mall, Sanitation and hygienic measures for customers, digital payment	Mall Loyalty
Shopping offers	50% or more discount offers, Multiple brands, Free products, coupons and vouchers	Mall Loyalty

A structured questionnaire was designed on 5-point Likert Scale (1 representing highly disagree and 5 representing highly agree). Cronbach's Alpha value was (0.830) significantly reliable Table 4.

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.830	12

Descriptive Statistics Table 5 reflected that mostly the customers belonging to age group 20-30 years (130 customers) visited the mall. 90 male customers and 58 female customers, mostly employed in the private sector (112) visited the mall. Majority of the respondents (80) had the monthly income above Rs. 41000. Most of the respondents were graduates (100).

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>		
Gender	Male-90, Female -58	(N-148)
Age	20- 30 years- 130, 31 to 40 years- 10, 41 years and above- 8	(N-148)
Income Level	Rs. 20000- Rs.30000 - 26 Rs. 31000- Rs. 40000- 42 41000 and above - 80	(N-148)
Education	Graduate- 100, Post Graduate- 32, Other- 16	(N-148)
Occupation	Students – 20, Private Employee- 112 Government Employee – 6, Business - 10	(N-148)

Hypotheses testing was done through Chi square test. The findings are mentioned in Table 6.

It was found that there was a significant relationship between the factors of Safety and Security measures and mall loyalty of customers. There was a significant difference between the factors of Convenience and Social distancing facilities and mall loyalty of customers. It was also found that there was a significant difference between the factors of Shopping offers available and mall loyalty of customers.

Hypotheses	N of Valid Cases	Pearson Chi-Square value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
$H_0A$	148	74.787 <sup>a</sup>	8	.000
$H_0B$	148	85.441 <sup>a</sup>	8	.000
$H_0C$	148	58.632 <sup>a</sup>	8	.000

Pearson correlation reflected that there was a significant relationship (.692) between the age of the customers and the Mall Loyalty by Shopping offers/ discounts. It was also found that there was a significant correlation (0.723) between the monthly income of the customer and the mall loyalty by Safety and Security measures. Table 7 represents the two significant correlation values. Other values were moderate in terms of significant correlation.

Variables	Pearson's correlation	Sig.(2-tailed)
Age of the customers and the Mall Loyalty by Shopping offers/ discounts	0.692	0.000
Monthly income of the customer and the mall loyalty by Safety and Security measures	0.756	0.000

Factor Analysis identified the top attributes that were contributing to mall loyalty in the Covid 19 outbreak. KMO and Barlett's Test value was 0.849 and statistically significant represented in Table 8. These attributes identified as Factor 1 were: Nearby locality, sitting options with social distancing, huge atrium/ open space in the mall, sanitation and hygienic measures, well distanced parking options, freshly cooked hot food and 50% or more discount offers. Customers were more loyal to Grand Central mall as per the findings of the present study.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.849
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	11780.436
	Df	66
	Sig.	0.000

If all the twelve attributes collectively contribute to 100% mall loyalty in the customers, then the seven attributes identified as factor 1 constitute 40.918% and it is highly significant factor. The total variance of the components is represented in Table 9.

**Table 9**  
**TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAINED**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %			
1	4.910	40.918	40.918	4.910	40.918	40.918
2	3.632	30.271	71.189	3.632	30.271	71.189
3	1.367	11.390	82.578	1.367	11.390	82.578

### Findings of the Study

The findings of the study reflect that the younger generation mostly visited the shopping malls post the lockdown in Mumbai. Most of them were male customers. The three dimensions - Safety and Security measures, Convenience and Social distancing facilities and Shopping offers were important for the mall customers. It was found that the older age group customers were majorly attracted to the shopping offers in the mall as compared to the younger ones. It was found that the higher the Monthly income of the customer, the greater was the likeness for safety and security measures in the mall. Nearby locality, sitting options with social distancing, huge atrium/ open space in the mall, sanitation and hygienic measures, well distanced parking options, freshly cooked hot food and 50% or more discount offers were most significant to the customers during the post pandemic visit to their favourite shopping mall.

#### Implications and Significance of the Results

The findings of the study have significant managerial implications on three important stakeholders in the shopping mall ecosystem. They are as follows:

**Customers-** They may analyze the safety measures and various options available at the mall before planning their visit.

**Mall Managers-** They may identify and strengthen the attributes that attract the customers to the malls during the situation of COVID 19

**Government support-** Government may relook at the measures followed at such malls and support the ones that are following the safety measures.

### CONCLUSION

Shopping is an inseparable norm of the society. Shopping malls have always attracted the customers to experience the overall process in a very pleasant manner. Even the outspread of COVID-19 pandemic could not stop the customers from visiting their favourite malls. Grand Central Mall in Navi Mumbai region was found to be the most preferred mall by the customers. The loyalty towards the mall was due to the various Safety and Security measures taken by the mall management. The findings of the present study reflect the attributes that are beneficial for both customers as well as the mall managers. The customers may look at the safety and security measures provided by their favourite mall and the managers may identify the attributes that they must strengthen to attract their customers. This would enable the recreation of the Shopping mall culture in the times to come.

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